

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Tama Teramoto Nishimura*

"Well, I really wasn't very happy about leaving [Japan] . . . but since my parents requested it, I had to do it. . . . I [first] thought I shouldn't have come to Hawai'i. (Laughs) Then my younger brother wrote to me from Japan that I should work hard in Hawai'i so that I could hurry and return to Japan, since, if I wrote that I wished I hadn't come to Hawai'i, my mother wouldn't be able to sleep at night."

Born in Kumamoto, Japan in 1904, Tama Teramoto Nishimura grew up on the family's farm, where they raised rice, wheat and silkworms. In 1923, Tama left Japan for Lāna'i to be the picture bride of Susumu Nishimura, a cowboy for Lāna'i Ranch.

After their marriage in Honolulu, they traveled to Lāna'i and lived briefly in Keomuku before moving up to Kō'ele. Tama cared for her father-in-law, husband, and her husband's five younger siblings. She also worked as a waitress and laundress for the George Munro family, and assisted Mrs. Masuka Abe, the Munros' cook.

Shortly after giving birth to their second daughter, the Nishimuras moved in 1928 to Lana'i City. Susumu left cowboy work to pursue other endeavors. He became a mailman, truck driver and rock crusher for Hawaiian Pineapple Company, movie theater manager, and service station proprietor.

After Susumu's death in 1985, Tama left Lāna'i to live with her daughter in Kihei, Maui, where she still resides today. Her only trip back to Japan was in 1968.

*For more information on Tama Teramoto Nishimura and her family, see Leonard Lueras' Kanyaku Imin: A Hundred Years of Japanese Life in Hawai'i (Honolulu: International Savings and Loan Association, Ltd.: 1985), pp. 38-39.

Tape No. 16-30-1-89TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Tama Teramoto Nishimura (TN)

February 2, 1989

Kīhei, Maui

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Judith Yamauchi.]

MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Tama Nishimura at her home in Kīhei, Maui on February 2, 1989. The interviewer is Michi Kodama-Nishimoto.

Nishimura-san, when were you born?

TN: In 1904.

MK: Where were you born?

TN: In a place called Kumamoto-ken, Uto-gun, Shiranuhi-mura, in Nagasaki.

MK: What sort of mura was it? Can you explain?

TN: It was a farming village. Everybody was in agriculture.

MK: How large was it?

TN: There were about 300 houses.

MK: What was your mother's name?

TN: It was Miju.

MK: What was your father's name?

TN: It was Busaku.

MK: Busaku Teramoto?

TN: Yes.

MK: How many were there in your family?

TN: There were eight children.

MK: Nishimura-san, which child were you?

TN: Me? I was the seventh child. There were three boys and five girls, and I had a younger brother below me.

MK: You say your parents were farmers, but there are various types of farmers. What sort of farming did your parents do?

TN: They were into rice farming. In the summer, they grew rice and in the winter they grew wheat. And they usually cultivated silkworms.

MK: What sort of work was involved in cultivating silkworms?

TN: In order to cultivate silkworms, you plant mulberry trees and harvest their leaves. In the autumn, everyone picks the mulberry leaves. In the spring, they cut the mulberry trees.

MK: You mentioned before about burlap-type mats for the silkworms . . .

TN: Yes, we made them.

MK: How do you use these mats?

TN: You make them with a weaving machine. This machine is fitted with a batten and lots of eyes for the various threads used to make kimonos. In order to make a silkworm mat you need thread here and there. And the box you put the silkworms into--this determines the mat size.

MK: After you make the mat, do you always wash it and reuse it?

TN: Yes, it is hung to dry. You know the straw left over after the rice is harvested? You cut and spread this dry straw over the mat. In Japan there is this slick type of material made so that they fit the box. They shake the straw and they place this net over this and then they place the mulberry leaves over this. Then the silkworms climb up to the mulberry leaves from below. But you must keep it dry or the silkworms will spoil. So you lay the cut straw into the box and place the netting over this and you turn it like this. You do this every day. It's called shirigae. You do it twice a day, every day.

MK: Was this year-round work?

TN: No, only during the spring, summer, and winter. Three cycles. During the winter, they are heated. The temperature is maintained at about seventy-two degrees. In the room where the silkworms are kept, there is a brazier in which charcoal is placed and a thermometer which must be watched closely all the time to prevent the silkworms from spoiling.

MK: Then cultivating silkworms is very labor-intensive work?

TN: No doubt about it! You can't be a bit careless. You must watch the temperature very carefully and if it gets too warm, immediately open the door to let in the air.

MK: Did other villagers also keep silkworms?

TN: Oh, yes. And there were silk-manufacturing companies where the cocoons are taken once they are formed.

MK: Was the price of silkworms good at that time?

TN: Yes, it was. We would spread material made of straw in the box and place perhaps seventy silkworms inside and they would go to a spot of their liking and spin their cocoons there. They do it very nicely.

MK: When you compare the price of silkworms and rice, which was the more profitable?

TN: The silkworms were higher.

MK: So you took the time to carefully tend them.

TN: Yes. We did not waste any of them. As the silkworms wove their cocoons, we would take every bit of this thread. And the silk-manufacturing companies bought all of it. Sometimes, two silkworms would get stuck together and they would weave a huge double cocoon, so we would have to separate them.

MK: Even though this took so much labor, did only the girls or boys do this work?

TN: No, there were men who also kept silkworms. But, usually they were only women.

MK: So in your family the girls ran the silkworm business. And the men . . .

TN: [They] tended to the farm work.

MK: Did the women help with the rice and wheat farming, too?

TN: Yes, they did.

MK: How did they help?

TN: With the rice?

MK: Yes.

TN: The rice would be cut and--they would be planted--we would grab

these in bundles of six and cut them and go along spreading them out. Those who were the fastest would go first. And we would place them all in order. And they would be dried in the field for two to three days. After they were dry, they would be brought in and put through a threshing machine.

MK: Did you do that work too?

TN: Oh, yes.

MK: What about in the case of wheat?

TN: In the case of wheat, there is a different threshing machine which you pull and the grains are removed. There are some huge stalks which are hung up and dried outside. After these are well dried, they are beaten and the grains drop from the heads. Then they are blown with a winnowing fan where the kernels fall down through a funnel and the husks are blown away.

MK: Did only the family participate in this work?

TN: Yes, only the family.

MK: Not as a cooperative?

TN: No, because all the other households had their own crops.

MK: Did you grow vegetables or keep other animals?

TN: We grew only the vegetables for our own consumption. We didn't water them as we do here. Once we planted them, when we went to look at them later, they would have grown this big. No one had to water them. They only had to be exposed to the sun and they would grow. Then we'd pick them as needed.

MK: During the winter, did the women and girls do weaving, etc.?

TN: Yes, they did. During the winter when there was time, we made things for the silkworms.

MK: Did the girls learn cooking and sewing?

TN: We did sewing, but our parents did the cooking. We didn't do that.

MK: What about your older sisters? Didn't they do some cooking?

TN: No, my mother did the cooking.

MK: You were the seventh child, but did you do any baby-sitting?

TN: No, since I was the last child--although I did have a younger brother.

MK: How many years apart are you and your younger brother?

TN: Two years.

MK: When you weren't busy working, what sort of playing did you do?

TN: In Japan, during the summer, if we worked for three days, we had one day off. During the summer, we didn't work very hard.

MK: What sorts of things did you do on your day off?

TN: On our days off we didn't do anything special. It's just that if we worked on our day off, the people in the village would get upset with us. When everyone else rested, we had to rest.

MK: But on your day off, didn't the children play anything?

TN: Yes, the girls would stay in the house and sew, etc.

MK: What about school?

TN: I was pau with school after the sixth grade.

MK: But did you go through the sixth grade?

TN: Yes.

MK: How did this compare with the other girls in the village? Was this the usual case?

TN: Yes, most of them quit after the sixth grade. However, if there were older sisters who could take care of the house, sometimes a girl could go on to intermediate school.

MK: What about in your case? Did you want to have more schooling?

TN: Oh, no. I really didn't care too much for school. (Laughs)

MK: What sorts of hopes did you have when you were young? Was there something you wanted to be when you grew up?

TN: No, nothing like that when I was young. (Chuckles)

MK: But by the time you turned seventeen or eighteen, wasn't there something you hoped to do in the future?

TN: I thought perhaps I would go to work at the silk-manufacturing company. I wanted to work at the factory. But the girls at the silk factory in our town would stick their faces out of the windows as people walked by and shout bad things at them. So people would say that silk factory girls were so bad even dogs wouldn't bite them. So even my mother didn't want me to go to work there.

MK: So you didn't go there.

TN: (Laughs) No, I didn't.

MK: What were your parents' hopes for you?

TN: Just that I stay at home and work with the silkworms.

MK: When you were nineteen years old, the subject of your picture bride marriage came up.

TN: About my becoming a picture bride--my oldest brother's wife was my husband's aunt. My Nishimura father-in-law in Hawai'i sent word that he was looking for a bride for his son and wouldn't they send one for him. Then this aunt suggested that I be sent to Hawai'i. But my mother said that since I was the last daughter, even though she had daughters-in-law, if she were to become old and ill, she would prefer to be cared for by her own daughter, so she was against sending me to Hawai'i. But my older brother's wife said that if they wouldn't let me go, she herself would go back home to the Nishimuras. It couldn't be helped so they had to let me go to Hawai'i.

MK: You mentioned earlier that your older sister was earmarked to come. I believe her name was Taka.

TN: Yes. She was Tama. She was the one who was supposed to come. But she went on to [mainland] America--under a different arrangement. My mother said that unless the older one was sent out first, the younger one couldn't go. It would make the older sister a leftover. So, my older sister was sent to America. So that's how our names changed.

MK: Your real name was Taka and your older sister's real name was Tama.

TN: Yes.

MK: When you heard about the arrangements being made for you to become the picture bride of Nishimura-san, how did you feel?

TN: I didn't think anything about it. In Japan you do just as your parents tell you to do.

MK: But, when you heard that in order to marry Nishimura-san, you would have to go off to faraway Hawai'i--how did you feel about leaving home for the first time?

TN: Well, I really wasn't very happy about leaving home.

MK: What sorts of feelings did you have?

TN: I wasn't very happy about it, but since my parents requested it, I had to do it.

MK: Were there many picture brides in your village?

TN: There really weren't that many picture brides going from our village.

MK: How about those going to Hawai'i?

TN: There were many people who had returned from Hawai'i in our village.

MK: Did you hear about Hawai'i?

TN: Yes, they all talked about Hawai'i--those who had come back from Hawai'i.

MK: What sorts of things did you hear about Hawai'i at that time?

TN: The people who had returned from Hawai'i said that Hawai'i was very hot; and it was even hotter when you had to wear leather gloves to handle the sugarcane leaves which were prickly.

MK: Did they mention Hawai'i's lunas and Hawaiian people?

TN: No, I didn't hear anything like that.

MK: What sort of place did you think Hawai'i was before you came?

TN: Since everyone said it was very hot, I thought it would be hot.

MK: Did you have any impressions about the work?

TN: Since everyone said that in Hawai'i people work in the cane fields, I assumed that I would have to work in the cane fields in Hawai'i.

MK: How did you feel about this?

TN: Instead of feeling anything, I just came. (Laughs)

MK: What was the name of the boat you came over on?

TN: Korea Maru.

MK: Korea Maru. Did you come from Kumamoto-ken via Nagasaki?

TN: Yes, I went through Nagasaki and boarded the Korea Maru.

MK: Where did you go from Nagasaki?

TN: You know that place between Kyushu and Honshu . . .

MK: Kobe?

TN: That's right, Kobe. I stayed for two or three days in Kobe and then loaded all our baggage and things. After we left Kobe, we went

to--Honshu's . . .

MK: Yokohama?

TN: Yes, Yokohama, that's where we went. From Yokohama, we came to Honolulu.

MK: In order to emigrate were there any tests you had to take?

TN: Oh yes, there were. There was the duodenal test for parasitic worms and the eye test . . .

MK: Was there a reading and writing test?

TN: Yes, there was. It is clearly written on the paper they give you how many years of schooling you have had. If it says, for instance, that you have gone through the sixth grade, they make you read sixth-grade material. But you never know ahead of time where they are going to make you read.

MK: Did you worry at all about this test?

TN: Well, it really wasn't any fun. You never knew what part they were going to make you read. For instance, they picked out a part about the invention of the steam engine and told me, "Read this!" When I told them it was about how they discovered it, they said, "Okay!" (Laughs) There were some who took a long time. They would get stuck on some parts.

MK: What about the duodenal or eye tests?

TN: In the duodenal parasite test, we were told to take the specimen from the inner part of the feces and not from the outside portion where the eggs were likely to be clinging. That's how afraid we were.

MK: But you didn't have any problems?

TN: Yes, I passed right away.

MK: What sort of baggage did you bring with you to Hawai'i from Japan?

TN: Only Japanese clothing. Nothing else. (Laughs) Even on the boat, everyone wore Japanese clothing.

MK: Did you bring any household items from home?

TN: No, none at all.

MK: Only clothing?

TN: Yes, only clothing. The boat was two-tiered. Those with babies stayed below. There was a ladder connecting the levels. The people

on the second floor--it's very complicated. They are separated into compartments with thick colored fabric and wood posts which you grab onto for support when you get up.

MK: How was the boat ride?

TN: Not good.

MK: Were you all right?

TN: Yes, I was. I didn't get sick.

MK: Were there other women from Kumamoto-ken on board?

TN: Yes, there were two or three from Kumamoto-ken. Also from Hiroshima, Fukuoka--all of them were being sent for--nine in all.

MK: Were there any bound for Lāna'i?

TN: No, just me. (Chuckles) They send a telegram about two or three days before the ship lands.

MK: To let everyone know you'll be arriving?

TN: Yes, that we'll be arriving.

MK: So you arrived on June 26, 1923 in Honolulu?

TN: Yes.

MK: What happened after you arrived in Honolulu?

TN: When I arrived, my sister was there.

MK: The one who lived in Pālama?

TN: Yes. She would come every day for about a week.

MK: Were you worried?

TN: Not at all. (Laughs)

MK: Why was your husband late in coming to get you?

TN: He told his father, "I didn't order her so you go get her." That's what Father used to say. But it did take time since they had to go from Lāna'i to Maui and then from Maui to Honolulu.

MK: But, ultimately both your husband and your father-in-law came to get you.

TN: Yes, Father brought him along.

MK: What happened after they met you?

TN: When they came to get me, Father stood close by while all of us who had come from Japan were inside. Then they start calling out names.

MK: When you first met your husband, what did you think?

TN: (Laughs) I didn't think anything--he came along with his father.

MK: After you met, where did you get married?

TN: At the Izumo Taisha [Mission] in Honolulu.

MK: After you got married at the Izumo Taisha, did you stay in Honolulu for a while or did you go on to Lāna'i?

TN: No, we stayed at my sister's in Honolulu for four or five days.

MK: So you went to Pālama for a while and then first on to Maui before going to Lāna'i?

TN: Yes, we had some relatives named Yamauchi who lived in Lahaina. We stayed there before going on to Lāna'i by boat.

MK: There are some things I'd like to ask about your husband. What was your husband's name?

TN: Susumu.

MK: Susumu Nishimura. Had his relatives been in Hawai'i for a long time?

TN: Oh yes. After all, he was born in Hawai'i. His father came to Hawai'i first; and in the old days people came over from Japan in a group. He went back to Japan to get my mother-in-law whom he brought back to Hawai'i.

MK: Where was your husband born?

TN: In Lahaina in a place called Kiawe Camp.

MK: How many years did he live in Lahaina?

TN: For quite a while, I think. Since day wages were low in Lahaina, his father said they were higher in Lāna'i; so they came to Lāna'i.

MK: I understand he went into ranch work when he came to Lāna'i, but what sort of work was this?

TN: He was a cowboy [at Lāna'i Ranch]. His father's work was cleaning the [Ranch] Camp.

MK: Were both your husband and his father cowboys?

TN: No, Father worked in the camp. My husband was a cowboy.

MK: I understand your husband could speak Japanese, English, as well as Hawaiian.

TN: Yes, he was very good in Hawaiian. (Laughs)

MK: Did he learn this Hawaiian in Lāna'i?

TN: Yes, since Lāna'i has nearly all Hawaiians.

MK: Did you hear stories about your husband's life here before you married him? Did you hear any stories of the days when your husband was a cowboy?

TN: I don't know anything about that. (Laughs)

MK: When you came to Lāna'i, where did your boat disembark?

TN: They brought a smaller boat from Lāna'i and we transferred from our boat onto this smaller boat and rode this to Keōmuku.

MK: What did you think? Were you afraid?

TN: No, not at all. (Laughs)

MK: When you first arrived, where did you live?

TN: Perhaps I first came to Keōmuku--yes, from Lahaina I came to Keōmuku. We stayed there for about one month. And then the boss told us to go up to the ranch so we did.

MK: What sort of place was Keōmuku?

TN: It was full of kiawe. Kiawe was so thick in places you couldn't see past it. You couldn't see next door. This was where the Nishimura mother [Mrs. Matsuyama] ran a watermelon business.

MK: How many people lived there?

TN: Do you mean at Keōmuku?

MK: Yes.

TN: Let me see. As far as Japanese were concerned, there were three men in the front of the Nishimura house and. . . . How many were there anyhow. In Keōmuku, there were the Nishimura parents and their watermelon business, and on this side there was an area called shiraiwa which had pure white rocks. After going over this and coming this way, at a place where the ranch started downslope, there were Japanese, two or three. And from there, if you go up from the valley, there was a machine which pumped the water up. They pumped the water up from the valley, which was called Maunalei [Gulch],

using this machine. There was a Japanese there.

MK: About how many houses were there in Keōmuku?

TN: In Keōmuku? Let me see. How many houses were there in Keōmuku--not even ten houses.

MK: It must have been a rather lonely place.

TN: Yes, it was. In the old days, there was a cemetery for those who had come here to work from Japan and died.

MK: I understand it is still there.

TN: Yes, it is. I wonder how many dead lie buried there. I think perhaps fourteen or fifteen people are buried there.

MK: So the people in Keōmuku all worked on the ranch?

TN: Yes, they did.

MK: What else did they do?

TN: There wasn't anything else.

MK: But Nishimura-san's mother had a watermelon business.

TN: Yes, she did.

MK: Were there any others who also ran businesses?

TN: No, there wasn't. [TN is referring only to Japanese.]

MK: What about making charcoal?

TN: Yes, besides running the watermelon business, they also made charcoal.

MK: What about beekeeping and making honey?

TN: That was done on the ranch. A Murata-san [i.e., Ichiro Tamura] did that, but that was ranch business.

MK: Oh, that wasn't a private business?

TN: No, that was ranch business. That was our boss's business.

MK: How many were in the Nishimura family at that time?

TN: There were five boys and one girl.

MK: Those were Nishimura-san's brothers and sisters?

TN: Yes, his brothers and sisters.

MK: Were there any Hawaiians at Keōmuku?

TN: Yes, there were.

MK: How were your relations with them?

TN: Hawaiians are good. They are friendly.

MK: As a person straight from Japan, how did you communicate with them during that month?

TN: They didn't talk to me since I couldn't understand them.

MK: They didn't talk with you at all?

TN: No.

MK: What did you do every day during this month you were at Keōmuku--what kind of work?

TN: Now, what did I do at Keōmuku?

MK: Did you look after the Nishimura household--such things as cooking and laundry?

TN: Yes, I did that. In the old days, we had to do everything by hand.

MK: At that time, did you live with your mother-in-law at Keōmuku?

TN: No, after I came, she immediately moved out.

MK: Since she moved out . . .

TN: There was a lot of housework.

MK: Did you do the bulk of it?

TN: Yes.

MK: What did you think of this?

TN: I thought I shouldn't have come to Hawai'i. (Laughs) Then my younger brother wrote to me from Japan that I should work hard in Hawai'i so that I could hurry and return to Japan, since, if I wrote that I wished I hadn't come to Hawai'i, my mother wouldn't be able to sleep at night. (Laughs)

MK: Did you yourself feel that you wanted to work hard to be able to go back to Japan soon?

TN: Yes, that's what I felt.

MK: About how many years did this feeling continue?

TN: After that, we were very poor and burdened with debts. We had so many debts that I couldn't even send any money home to my parents while they were still healthy.

MK: So you stayed in Lāna'i?

TN: Yes.

MK: After one month, you went to Kō'ele. Is it far from Keōmuku to Kō'ele?

TN: Oh, yes, you certainly couldn't walk there.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: What was the name of your boss at the ranch?

TN: [George C.] Munro.

MK: What sort of place was Kō'ele when you first went there--at the ranch?

TN: The ranch was cool and nice. Very cool.

MK: How many houses were there?

TN: About fourteen or fifteen houses, I think.

MK: About how many lived at the ranch?

TN: I think the ranch boss was there a long time already.

MK: How many were at the ranch counting the workers as well as the boss's family, etc.?

TN: The ranch boss's family--the girls had already left and didn't live there--included only the boss and his wife [Jean Munro] and his son named James. His wife died there. Those were the boss's family. Then there was the cook named Abe-san. The wife [Masuka Abe] was the cook and the husband [Eizo Abe] was the yardman. Then there was the waiter-man named Morita-san. Mr. and Mrs. [Toyoki] Morita. And then there was someone named Kanno-san. And Namae-san. There was one more Japanese person. So of the Japanese there were Kawano-san [Morikazu Kawano], Nakamura-san, and us Nishimuras, and did I say Morita-san?

MK: Yes, you did.

TN: Let me see--who else was there. Oh, there were some Koreans--about four.

MK: Do you know their names?

TN: Let me see. . . . What were their names, now. There was one named Kim. And also . . .

MK: Kwon.

TN: Yes, one named [Gi Hong] Kwon. There were Kim and Kwon and--I think perhaps my girl [Fusako Uchimura] might know their names.

MK: About four of them?

TN: Yes. About four.

MK: What about Hawaiians?

TN: There were quite a few Hawaiians. There was one Japanese who had been abandoned by his parents and was brought up by Hawaiians in Lahaina. Although he was Japanese, he didn't understand any Japanese.

MK: Do you remember his name?

TN: Now what was his name. . . . (Laughs) [TN may be thinking of Kimo Roberts.]

MK: Was it a Japanese or Hawaiian name?

TN: It was a Hawaiian name.

MK: What kind of work did they all do? For instance, Abe-san . . .

TN: Abe-san was a yardboy; his wife was the cook.

MK: And Morita-san?

TN: Morita-san was the waiter-man.

MK: And Kanno-san?

TN: Kanno-san was a yardman.

MK: And Namae-san?

TN: Namae-san was a camp-man [i.e., ranch maintenance man]. Nishimura papa was also a camp-man.

MK: What about Kawano-san?

TN: Kawano-san was just below the boss of the ranch. He was below the boss of all the men at the ranch--Kawano-san was. He was from

Hiroshima-ken.

MK: And your husband was a cowboy?

TN: Yes. And later he was a mailman.

MK: After you moved to Lāna'i City?

TN: No, at the ranch as well. He was a mailman there, too.

MK: I didn't know that.

TN: Yes, he did it at the ranch, too.

MK: There were many people at the ranch and . . .

TN: And Kawano-san was the assistant below the ranch boss.

MK: Where did everyone live?

TN: In Kō'e'ele.

MK: Where in Kō'e'ele?

TN: At the ranch in Kō'e'ele.

MK: There was something about living in the second row below the mountain.

TN: Yes, that was just at the base of the mountain--the ranch in Kō'e'ele.

MK: Were all the houses arranged in a row?

TN: Yes, they were.

MK: About how many houses were there?

TN: Well, there was Kawano-san first, then a Hawaiian's house, then Nakamura-san, and then one, two, three houses, and below them were us, and below us were the Morita-sans, and then Abe-san, Kanno-san, Namae-san. I think there were about fourteen or fifteen houses.

MK: Where did the Hawaiians and the Koreans live?

TN: At the same place--the same camp.

MK: There were of a different races, but how did you get along?

TN: Everyone got along well.

MK: How did you communicate? You spoke Japanese and . . .

TN: I could only speak Japanese, so I didn't speak to the others.

MK: You didn't have much connection with them?

TN: No, I didn't.

MK: What kind of homes were there at that time? Please explain.

TN: The houses were made of rough wood. They were made of wide strips of rough wood. And where the pieces of wood came together, they pounded another piece of wood. There were three bedrooms and a parlor and there was a separate kitchen where we could eat--a section where we cooked and a section where we ate.

MK: So each house had a kitchen and a place to eat?

TN: Yes.

MK: What about the toilet and the bathroom?

TN: The toilets were all common.

MK: How many houses to a toilet?

TN: There were about five or six in the camp. They were partitioned off.

MK: Was there a bath?

TN: Yes, at a bathhouse.

MK: At your own house?

TN: Yes, at our own house. It was fired up with wood. We would be given the wood. As long as we went to get it.

MK: You mean from the ranch?

TN: Yes. And we would light it up every day.

MK: So everyone had their own baths.

TN: Yes. And we had plenty of water.

MK: Then compared with a plantation house, they were much better.

TN: Yes. Was it different at a plantation house?

MK: In O'ahu, sometimes they didn't have baths except for a common camp bath.

TN: What I am talking about is at the ranch. In the lower camps [Hawaiian Pineapple Company employee camps], there were common baths. In the lower areas, there were many workers who came to Lana'i. They all had common baths. They were spread here and there

in the camps.

MK: So where you lived, you had a kitchen and bath, but what about a laundry area?

TN: Yes, at the bath area . . .

MK: A separate one?

TN: Yes.

MK: From about 1922, Lāna'i City started to develop. If you wanted to go to Lāna'i City, did you walk?

TN: We went by car. We had a car.

MK: Who owned a car?

TN: Everyone had a car.

MK: Individually?

TN: Yes, we all had cars.

MK: Where did you do your shopping?

TN: When there was only the ranch and the lower part [Lāna'i City] wasn't developed yet, at the ranch twice a week a bell would ring and when we went to the office [i.e., store], they would have everything. You could order anything there from Honolulu. They stocked it there so we bought it there.

MK: They ordered from Honolulu rather than from Lahaina?

TN: Yes, from Honolulu.

MK: Could you order Japanese foods and goods--things like nori or sōmen?

TN: They had shoyu. As for sōmen, when Father went to Lahaina, he would bring this back.

MK: Such things had to be bought in Lahaina?

TN: Yes.

MK: About how many times a month did he go to Lahaina to shop?

TN: I think he went to Lahaina about two or three times a month--since he would have to take the mail.

MK: At the same time he would do the shopping?

TN: Yes.

MK: What do those who don't have to take the mail do?

TN: They would buy things from this office.

MK: What if they wanted things like sōmen or udon?

TN: They just can't eat them, I think.

MK: So they could just have Haole foods--things they could order at the office?

TN: Yes.

MK: In those days, what sorts of things did you order?

TN: Let me see . . .

MK: Rice or . . .

TN: Yes, rice or shoyu or sugar or salt--those things were always available.

MK: Canned goods?

TN: Yes, they had canned goods--canned meats, etc.

MK: What about fresh beef or fish?

TN: We had all the beef we wanted since it was a ranch.

MK: Did you receive it from the ranch or buy it?

TN: We had all the beef we wanted very cheaply.

MK: Was there a real store--with a butcher, etc.?

TN: No, there wasn't.

MK: Only when they slaughtered?

TN: Yes, only when they slaughtered.

MK: What about clothes and fabric?

TN: There wasn't anything like that. There were no clothes.

MK: If you wanted those things . . .

TN: We would get them when we went outside.

MK: In Lahaina?

TN: Yes.

- MK: When you or your husband were ill, what did you do?
- TN: If someone were sick, we would take him to Lahaina.
- MK: Did you ever have to take anyone?
- TN: No, we've never gone from our home.
- MK: Your children?
- TN: Yes, including them.
- MK: There was a post office, right?
- TN: Yes.
- MK: Did you have a telephone then?
- TN: There were only telephones in Lahaina.
- MK: What about electricity--was there electricity from the beginning?
- TN: Yes, there was electricity. When there was only the ranch, there was a machine [generator] in the back for electricity.
- MK: While you lived in Kō'ele, what sort of work did you do?
- TN: While we lived in Kō'ele, I didn't do anything--just the housework.
- MK: Did you do waitress work at the Munro household?
- TN: At the Munro house, I did that just a short while--I had a baby so a person named Morita-san came in to relieve me.
- MK: What sort of work did you do in the Munro household?
- TN: The laundry. And waitering. During the land development of Lāna'i [i.e., the development of Lāna'i City starting in 1923], there were many who had come to do surveying, etc. There were many of them who came to eat at the boss's table.
- MK: So, the people who came to work in developing Lāna'i City--they ate at the ranch?
- TN: Yes, in the beginning.
- MK: Did these people sleep at the ranch as well?
- TN: Yes, they pitched tents. At the lower camp they pitched tents. At night when it rained, the tents would be blown over. They used to say they had some awful times. So the first things they built were their own houses and cookhouses. After these were built, they did everything by themselves.

MK: Before this, you did everything?

TN: Yes.

MK: You were the waitress, laundress, did you also cook?

TN: No, the cooking was done by Abe-san.

MK: This was the boss Munro's cook?

TN: Yes.

MK: Before that, were you a waitress for Munro?

TN: Yes, Abe-san was the cook and after I quit, Morita-san took over as waitress.

MK: So you quit because you gave birth to a child?

TN: Yes.

MK: Fusako-san [Fusako Nishimura Uchimura] was born in 1924 and Miyoko-san in 1927. These days we go, for example, to Kapi'olani Hospital to give birth, but what about in those days--when you had a child in Kō'e'ele, Lāna'i?

TN: There was a midwife. She wasn't a real midwife, but everyone called on her and she even got papers from the doctor and she did everything.

MK: Do you remember her name?

TN: Otsuka-san. We called her Otsuka no obasan. This woman worked so hard, but her husband was a lazy no-account. (Laughs)

MK: So Otsuka no obasan worked very hard.

TN: The woman was such a good person and worked so hard. The husband was such a lazy good-for-nothing and never wanted to work.

MK: Did Otsuka-san work only as a midwife?

TN: Yes.

MK: She didn't do anything else?

TN: No.

MK: When she worked as a midwife, how long did she attend a person?

TN: For us, she came throughout a whole month.

MK: From morning to night?

TN: Yes. No, when I said a month, I meant she would wash the baby and take care of me.

MK: For about a month?

TN: Yes, for about a month, there were too many other places to go so she couldn't go to all of them.

MK: In 1928, when Miyoko-san was about one, you moved to Lāna'i City. Why did you move?

TN: Let me see. Why did we go to Lāna'i City from the ranch?

MK: Was your husband still working at the ranch--when you moved to Lāna'i City?

TN: By the time we moved to Lāna'i City, he was no longer working at the ranch.

MK: He was a mailman?

TN: Yes.

MK: It was mentioned previously that you moved to Lāna'i City because it was more convenient for you there.

TN: Yes, that was probably it.

MK: I believe it was Fusako-san who said that.

TN: That was probably the reason. It was so inconvenient at the ranch.

MK: When you moved to Lāna'i City in 1928, what was there in those days?

TN: Let me see, by the time we went down, I think there were already a lot of houses there.

MK: When you say a lot, about how many houses do you mean?

TN: After Murayama-san came, many houses came up so . . .

MK: Was Murayama-san a carpenter?

TN: He was in the business of building camps.

MK: When you moved to Lāna'i City, at first where did you live?

TN: In the beginning, we lived toward the lower end of the camp [i.e., Lāna'i City]. At a place which didn't even have a room. Later, a house was built higher up and we moved there.

MK: What was your first house like, please explain--the first house you had in Lāna'i City.

TN: The first house had nothing. How many people were there anyhow? At the first house . . .

MK: Were you there at the first house for many years?

TN: No, just a short while.

MK: How many bedrooms were in your first house?

TN: None at all.

MK: At your Kō'ele house you had bedrooms and a kitchen . . .

TN: Oh, yes, the Kō'ele house was great.

MK: The Lāna'i City house had none?

TN: Nothing.

MK: Only one room?

TN: Only one room.

MK: Where were the kitchen and bath?

TN: When we first came down to the camp, the bath was common.

MK: And the kitchen?

TN: Now, how was the kitchen? I can't remember.

MK: You were at the first house for just a while. Was it a year?

TN: Oh, no!

MK: Not even a year?

TN: Yes.

MK: Where was your second house?

TN: The second house was higher up.

MK: Toward Lāna'i City?

TN: Yes.

MK: What sort of house was that?

TN: That house had three bedrooms.

MK: Did it have a kitchen?

TN: Yes.

MK: And bath?

TN: The bath was shared with everyone.

MK: After moving to Lāna'i City, what about your shopping?

TN: There was already a store there.

MK: Which store?

TN: It was called Okamoto-san [Tokuichi Okamoto].

MK: Okamoto-san. It wasn't the store of Hawaiian Pine?

TN: No, it was Okamoto-san's own [general] store [i.e., Okamoto Store].

MK: Were there other stores?

TN: Yes, there was a Pāke store run by a Chinese person called Yet Lung.

MK: So there were those two stores and . . .

TN: In the middle there was a playing area and there was a road coming this way and one going down. This way was the Chinese store called Yet Lung [Store] and on the road going down was Okamoto-san's store.

MK: Were there any others?

TN: Way below Okamoto-san's store there was the--it was a store run by two Japanese.

MK: What sorts of things did they sell?

TN: Everything.

MK: With all these stores, did you still have to go to Lahaina for some things?

TN: No, after we had these stores, we no longer went.

MK: Did you still have a car?

TN: Yes, we had a car.

MK: At that time, the [Hawaiian] Pineapple Company had already come in and developed Lāna'i City. What sort of neighbors did you have?

TN: The neighbors were all good people.

MK: Japanese?

TN: Yes, Japanese.

MK: Mainly Japanese.

TN: Yes, mainly Japanese.

MK: All working in pineapple?

TN: Yes, all pineapple workers.

MK: What sort of work did your husband do when you lived in Lāna'i City?

TN: What did my husband do when he was in Lāna'i City?

MK: Work as a mailman?

TN: Yes.

MK: Fusako-san mentioned that he worked as a truck driver and as a luna of the pineapple company.

TN: Yes, he did work as a truck driver. He worked as a rock crusher for building roads going to the Lāna'i harbor [i.e., Kaunalapau Harbor] or to the camp. At this quarry, they had trucks with metal beds on them. There were many of these and he would load the crushed rocks onto these by the yard.

MK: I understand he also worked in the pineapple fields.

TN: What did he do in the pineapple fields now . . .

MK: A luna . . .

TN: I think he charted things like how many pineapples the people planted, etc.

MK: Also as a movie theater operator in Lāna'i . . .

TN: Yes.

MK: How was this work?

TN: He did this for a long time. He ran the Lāna'i Theater's moon picture machine [i.e., movie projector].

MK: I understand he retired in 1949 or 1950. Looking at an article about you, I see that he had a taxi service. How did this get started?

TN: He would taxi people who were coming up from Kaunalapau since there was no one to bring them up.

MK: By himself?

TN: Yes.

MK: Did he earn a lot at this work?

TN: Yes, you can earn a lot.

MK: Looking at this article in the book, he says he earned a lot from his taxi business so he was able to send his father back to Japan. Is this true?

TN: Yes, it is.

MK: With just these earnings?

TN: Yes.

MK: Did he run this taxi service for a long time?

TN: Yes, he taxied for a long time.

MK: And later a gasoline station?

TN: Yes, a gasoline station.

MK: How did he start that?

TN: You mean the gasoline station?

MK: Yes.

TN: There weren't any gasoline stations in Lāna'i. And people said someone should start one, so my husband and [his] younger brother also wanted to do it. And the Lāna'i boss said that if the two of them worked it, there would be strength in numbers.

MK: Did the [plantation] boss help them get started?

TN: No.

MK: He just advised them that it would be better for both of them to do it together.

TN: Yes.

MK: Was this younger brother named Jimmy [i.e., Shigeo Nishimura]?

TN: Yes, it was Jimmy.

MK: After you opened the service station, did you help out, too?

TN: Yes, I helped.

MK: How did you help?

TN: I pumped gas.

MK: When were you the busiest?

TN: During sundown. That's when we were busiest.

MK: Were you open during certain hours?

TN: Yes, from 6:00 in the morning until about 8:30 at night.

MK: Did you live close to the service station?

TN: It was close by.

MK: What about if someone wanted gas after 8:30 p.m.?

TN: We would lock up the gas station in anticipation of 8:30 p.m. We would lock so it would look like nobody was there, since we had posted our hours.

MK: Before you started helping at the gas station, did you do any other kind of work in Lāna'i City?

TN: I don't know what I did.

MK: According to Fusako-san, you did some sewing.

TN: Yes, I was a dressmaker for about fifteen years.

MK: What sorts of things did you sew?

TN: I sewed dresses.

MK: Were they ordered dresses?

TN: Yes, when someone made an order, I would take their measurements and they would choose a pattern from a style book (Sears or Montgomery Ward catalog), and I would sew it.

MK: How did you learn such dressmaking?

TN: I studied dressmaking for over a year from someone who had come from the island of Hawai'i. I can't remember her name, but she was from the island of Hawai'i and very skilled at it.

MK: So you studied for one year . . .

TN: She made many of us ladies sew. She made us cut out the patterns and sew them up.

MK: You did this for fifteen years?

TN: Yes.

- MK: What sorts of things did you sew in those days?
- TN: I sewed things for children as well as adults and middle aged--for women, too. I didn't sew for boys.
- MK: Do you still sew?
- TN: No, we sold our sewing machine before we came [to Maui], so I no longer sew.
- MK: So you had three children there in Lāna'i--three girls. They all went to school there, but did you also have them go to Japanese-language school?
- TN: Yes, they went.
- MK: Where was the Japanese-language school?
- TN: It was below the church--below the Japanese church [Lāna'i Hongwanji Mission].
- MK: Up to what year did they go?
- TN: I think it was up to about the second year of high school.
- MK: Since there were so many Japanese in Lāna'i, did the Japanese occasionally hold gatherings such as at obon?
- TN: Yes, they did. We had bon odori and things like that.
- MK: What did they have at the bon odori?
- TN: Bon odori? A man would sit on a platform and beat a drum and sing, and the people would line up and dance along.
- MK: Did they sell food in those days?
- TN: Yes, they did.
- MK: What did you do on the Emperor's birthday?
- TN: We used to celebrate it.
- MK: What sorts of things did you do?
- TN: The Emperor's birthday? What did we do during the Emperor's birthday?
- MK: Did people gather and take pictures and have sūmo. . . . Did you have such things?
- TN: Yes, we had them. Sūmo-toris came from (Lahaina,) Maui and had matches.

MK: What about during New Year's in Lāna'i?

TN: New Year's wasn't that great.

MK: With just the family?

TN: Yes.

MK: You lived in Lāna'i City until 1985. You lived for a long time in Lāna'i, but what changed the most during this time?

TN: In Lāna'i?

MK: Yes.

TN: In the old days, Lāna'i was only the ranch, but houses were built on the lower side and many people came and planted pineapple and the population increased and things like that.

MK: How do you feel about these changes?

TN: I think it was good.

MK: Why do you think it was good?

TN: In contrast to the old days, now everything is available to us.

MK: You've lived in Lāna'i for a long time and lived there through the war years. How was it during the war?

TN: After the war started, the Japanese were put under a curfew and we couldn't go out at night. Early in the evening we would have to put out the lights and go to bed.

MK: Were there any other things which changed during the war?

TN: No, other than that, nothing.

MK: Nothing to worry about?

TN: No, nothing.

MK: After the war came to an end, the unions came in. In 1951, there was a large strike. What happened during this strike--to your service station?

TN: You mean during the strike?

MK: Yes, during the strike. Were you still running the service station?

TN: No, at that time, we were no longer running it. [The service station opened in November 1951, two months after the 1951 strike ended.]

MK: You no longer had it?

TN: No.

MK: How was it during the strike? How did the Nishimuras fare?

TN: During the strike?

MK: Was your husband still working?

TN: By the time of the strike, he was no longer working (for Hawaiian Pineapple Company).

MK: He had retired?

TN: Yes.

MK: My last question is: after coming to Hawai'i and living in Lāna'i for such a long period of time, what do you think?

TN: Lāna'i was good.

MK: Why?

TN: It was cool and everything felt good. Lāna'i was very good.

MK: Do you feel it was better to have come here from Japan?

TN: At first, I didn't think so, but later on, I thought it was good.

MK: We will end here. Thank you very much.

TN: That's all right.

END OF INTERVIEW

LĀNA'I RANCH

The People of Kō'ele and Keōmuku

VOLUME I

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